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THE NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION.

1512 H Street, N. W.,

Washington, D. C.

THE DISASTER TO THE YELLOWSTONE ELK HERD.

Now that the facts are measurably ascertained and the possibilities determined concerning the disaster which has befallen one of the Natkon's most splendid possessions, the Yellowstone Elk Herd, the situation should be authoritatively laid before the members of the Association. Newspaper accounts far understated the truth.

The herd normally contains 30,000 elk. It has come down in uninterrupted descent from the great wild-life days before the coming of the white man. It naturally divides into two practically equal parts which are spoken of as the Northern and the Southern herds. When the park, which is a lofty shallow volcanic bowl, collects heavy snows in winter, the Northern Herd drifts into the mountains north and east to wind-swept slopes often across the park boundary where grazing may be found by pawing up the lighter snow. The Southern Herd drifts East and South, gathering in large numbers in Jackson Hole, the area which it is proposed to add to the Yellowstone National Park. Hay is usually stored here to feed 4,000 elk.

In order to protect the elk from the hunters who surround the park during the open season, the Legislature of Wyoming has set apart game preserves along the eastern and southern boundaries. But Montana has refused to protect the northern boundary with a similar game preserve, and this year even extended the elk-shooting season at the park boundary from October 15 to December 24.

In late October of this year began a series of storms in the Yellowstone region unequalled in severity for more than thirty years. Snow fell to such depth that both herds were immediately driven out of the park and even, in many cases, beyond the game preserves, for the previous summer had been dry and unproductive of the usual quantity of grass; the Northern Herd passed far beyond its usual winter haunts, and descended in great numbers into the lower valley of the Yellowstone.

With news of this, Montana hunters immediately gathered in unprecedented numbers north of the park boundary. There was no limit to the licenses issued. Men who had never hunted rushed to the park to get an elk. The valley and mountain slopes quickly became crowded with armed men, and the elk fell in extraordinary numbers, many of them just after crossing the park line, others miles up the Yellowstone valley.

In the excitement of the general slaughter, even the Montana law, which limits the kill but permits the shooting of does and fawns was forgotten. Men fired by volleys into the wandering bands, scarcely taking time to aim, heedless of law or sportsmanship, carried out of their senses by greed of flesh. It recalled the dreadful last days of the buffalo. The valley became a slaughter pen.

The fact that thousands of these elk had no fear of men, having become accustomed to tourists within the sanctuary of the national park where they were petted and fed and often grazed in large bands, like cattle, around the hotels and inhabited dwellings of Mammoth Hot Springs, made the spectacle one of special horror.

Carcasses were shipped out daily by the car load and train load.

It is probable that, by Christmas, between 6,000 and 7,000 elk were thus slaughtered outright, and that between 2,000 and 3,000 afterward died in the Montana mountains from wounds inflicted by careless or inefficient marksmanship, or by shooting for general results into bands. In this way was the proud Northern Herd of 15,000 elk reduced to a probable 6,000.

Following the slaughter, starvation faced both herds, for the excessive snows covered the grazing lands too deeply for even the industrious feet of the elk to penetrate. Ten thousand of the Southern Herd gathered in Jackson Hole, where there was only hay for 4,000. The remnants of the Northern Herd were scattered far afield.

But starvation happily has been averted for the Southern Herd through the activity of Director E. M. Nelson of the U. S. Biological Survey, who has been able to divert other appropriations to meet the emergency. Seven hundred additional tons of hay have just been purchased, and enough more is in sight to save the situation there.

The remnant of the Northern Herd has still to be provided for. Superintendent Horace M. Albright of the Yellowstone National Park spent his next spring's road-improvement money for additional hay, but still more is needed and there is no more money legally available.

The National Parks Association became active as soon as facts developed sufficiently to indicate a useful part. It then lost no time in placing the facts and conditions before many sister associations, urging them to take such helpful action as each deemed appropriate. Most of these promptly reported their eagerness to help.

As one result of a conference with three other organizations in New York City, the National Parks Association, on December 13, with eleven days still remaining before the Montana Elk shooting season closed, sent the following telegram to the Governor of Montana:

Hon. Samuel V. Stewart, Governor of Montana, Helena, Montana. Five thousand of the world-celebrated Yellowstone National Park elk herd have already been shot this season in Montana, just over the park border, dangerously depleting the stock. The undersigned, in defense of one of America's noblest wild animal possessions, ask you by executive action to stop the slaughter at once, and to use your official influence for the creation this year of a game preserve on the Montana side of the park similar to those which Wyoming has created on the park's eastern and southern boundaries; also for the modification of the game laws which now permit six weeks of shooting at the national park line, which during winters of exceptionally heavy snow, like the present, the elk necessarily cross in search of food. The loss by shooting of a large part of the herd is a national calamity.

Signed-

Robert Sterling Yard,

Executive Secretary, National Parks Association.

Edmund Seymour,

President; American Bison Society.

John B. Burnham,

President, American Game Protective and Propagation Association.

William B. Greely,

Chairman, Conservation Committee, Camp Fire Club of America.

But the season was not closed ahead of schedule. The slaughter continued until Christmas eve.

There is no session of the Montana legislature this winter, and means have still to be perfected to secure the protection north of the Yellowstone park boundary which will be necessary to safeguard the Northern Herd in future and to enable it to recuperate by National increase. Practical suggestions to this end are called for. A capable committee of the Association must be organized.

Meantime the feeding of the northern remnant remains. The Department of the Interior has enough hay on hand to last till the end of March, but only by underfeeding, and this is no winter to underfeed. After that it will be six weeks or more before the snows will melt enough to enable the elk to find sufficient living, and that period may be lengthened by a late winter. Superintendent Albright estimates that it will take \$6,000 to see the danger through, and a bill before Congress is preparing for that amount.

So we face again the question of Congressional delay. Congress may put this bill through promptly, or, with its enormous legislative program, it may not pass it until too late to help materially. Who will predict? Meantime neighborhood hay stocks are lessening rapidly and the price is rising.

Meantime, also, contributions are reaching the National Parks Association for the rescue of the Elk; all money received for the purpose will be spent for the purchase of hay under the supervision of the Superintendent of the Yellowstone National Park. The Association will keep its members advised of developments in the situation. If it becomes necessary to raise money quickly, a call will be sent out for all members to make collections. But it is to be hoped that Congress will act in good time.

Robert Sterling Yard,

Executive Secretary.